The Columbus Dispatch

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143 slain in city in 2017

Drugs, gangs fuel record for homicides

By Lucas Sullivan and Beth Burger
The Columbus Dispatch

Candles illuminated first grief and then horror on the faces of children at the vigil for a slain friend as dark-clothed gunmen sprayed the crowd of mourners with bullets.

The group had gathered on Barthman Avenue on the South Side in mid-December to remember Brandon Meeks, 29, who had been gunned down there two days earlier.

Four more were struck with bullets during that vigil, including a 9-year-old girl. One of them died: Chaz Robertson, 32, a friend of Meeks.

In what has been the deadliest year in Columbus' 205-year history, this homicide was the most galling for city leaders, police and leaders of the black community.

Robertson's killing was No. 132 of the year. In all, 143 people died to break the city's record of 139 set in 1991 at the height of the cocaine wars.

"When people can't even gather to mourn their loved one without fearing for their safety, what kind of community do we have?" said Nana Watson, head of the Columbus chapter of the NAACP.

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COLD High: 13 Low: 1
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Children play at the Wedgewood Village Apartments on Christmas Eve. Hundreds of children live in the Hilltop complex where seven people were fatally shot in 2017. [FRED SQUILLANTE/DISPATCH]

Safety is goal at deadliest location

By Jim Woods
The Columbus Dispatch

It started on a wretched, cold, rainy night in January when two young friends were shot to death while sitting in a car in the parking lot at the Wedgewood Village Apartments complex.

Their unsolved homicides are believed to be connected to a robbery, Columbus police homicide detectives say. One of the two victims, Jawuan Lamont Wade Reynolds, 22, was a West Side rapper who went by the name Fam Staxx. Before he died, a video he posted on YouTube had the eerily prophetic title "*Killumbus*."

Homicide detectives have investigated three other fatal shootings at the sprawling complex on the Hilltop

SEE SAFETY, A7

YOUR SCHOOLS
COLUMBUS

Selective admission now is up to state

By Bill Bush
The Columbus Dispatch

Columbus City Schools' plan to expand the number of alternative buildings using "selective admission," in which students who maintain good grades and disciplinary records receive preference for getting into certain schools, is now official. An application for the district's new Africentric Early College campus is before the state Board of Education.

If the plan is approved, starting next school year Africentric would join five other district buildings — including Columbus Alternative High School and Eastmoor Academy — that set aside 20 percent of their open slots for a selective-admission program in addition to the annual attendance lottery, in which chance determines which students get in.

The district wanted to make the percentage of selective admission at Africentric even higher, but the Ohio Department of Education told the district it should limit its request to 20 percent, said district spokesman Scott Varner.

"I think it strengthens the educational program," said Todd Walker, the director of the K-12 Africentric program, which is technically two schools in a new, $42 million,

SEE ADMISSION, A9

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